1. The Beginning of Life.

842 A. The Desire for Children: adoption.

Children are greatly desired by the Amhara, and a childless home is regarded as under a heavenly curse. Children are regarded as continuing the "byet", the residential extended family; as a source of riches from childhood on when they begin economic tasks; as a source of comfort and security in old age; as defenders in feuds and wars; even after the death of parents, children help them into heaven by means of "tïzkar".

588 When a woman is barren, and amulets have proven no cure for her, she may give her husband a concubine, "zïrïd" (lit. servant maid), so that he will not feel deprived of fatherhood and begin 597 to hate her. Or she may adopt a child, preferably an orphan of kinfolk or a well-known family, by taking the child to the confessor-priest and swearing the oath of ecclesiastical adoption, whereupon the child becomes "ïzgal kidan lej" (lit. contract-child). This may include the ceremony of "breast-mother", "ïtut ennat", previously described. Less fortunate is the foster child, not formally adopted, who lives with the foster parents, guards the crops and herds the cows, but is more completely dependent on the good will of the "bread mother", "ïnïra ennat".

593 Fathers, whether natural or adopted, expect complete obedience from their children, particularly after they have arrived at the "age of reason". Fathers feel defensively obliged to maintain their authority; as the proverbs say of a father addressing the 593 son:

539 "Sheep! If I do not eat you, you would devour me", said the hyena". (meaning: perhaps you'd

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[539] like to order me about?).

"He who talks before his father does,
his mouth will become like that of a leper".

Older brothers may discipline younger siblings, but there is less emphasis on the privileges of the first-born than in Arab countries. The Amhara is aware that younger brothers may often become more honored, richer and wiser later in life:

[539] "Formerly, he (the older) pulled his (the younger's) ear, later on, the horn of the other (the younger) became bigger".

586 In case of divorce, which is frequent, children not staying with one of the parents are quickly taken by kinfolk. Thus, children are often raised by their grandparents, paternal or maternal, who often are young enough to have small children of their own. It is not even rare to see children of a divorcee by her first marriage may be raised by the family of her second husband even after she has divorced and left him also. This is more likely to happen in a town, where the consanguinal kin ties are weakened due to absence of the factor of kin residence, than in the residential kin hamlet. (Foreign observers have paraphrased an old English saying and adapted it to this situation in Abyssinia:

B. Pregnancy, Birth, Circumcision.

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843 According to popular observation, 25% of all women, especially in the towns, are barren, and another 25% have frequent miscarriages. There are many precautions taken against these mishaps. A pregnant woman may wear extra cowrie shells, "gasol"; in addition to amulets written against the evil spirit "tela" (lit. shadow, an envious female spirit) which brings miscarriages, kills babies at

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

842 birth, or later by causing its joints to swell.

843 It is considered impossible for a woman to conceive while still breastfeeding a baby. This belief is so strong that no precautions are taken, coitus proceeds as usual after the first few months, and when a pregnancy does occur it is regarded as a freak of nature and misfortune.

841 These physical matters are more discussed by women than by men. Menstruation is differentiated in several ways: "tärekkäsä" - she has become impure; "räggämä" - the (monthly) curse is on her; "edef" - the discharge of menstruation; "bädäm nat" (lit. she is in blood). Husbands are expected to shun "the dirt" and avoid sex relations during that time.

843 As a pregnancy advances, women wrap a long cotton girdle around the belly and waist, "näqänät", for support, and continue this some time after childbirth.

843 574 844 About two months before a woman is about to give birth, ("ərkuz" - woman in advanced pregnancy), she often leaves her husband and goes to the hamlet of her parents'. There she knows she will be taken care of, fed, constantly attended, treated by the local experienced woman who acts as midwife, and not be expected to follow any of her housewifely duties such as fetching water, cooking, brewing beer, gathering fuel, etc. After birth she will usually remain at her parents' for some months, until her childbed, "arəs" period (usually 80 days) is over. During 304 this time, circumcision and clitorectomy are performed. For even good husbands are regarded as so habituated to the wifely services that they become impatient with the wife at this time.

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

814 During parturition, the midwife usually sits on the ground in such a position that the baby will drop into her lap. The mother usually kneels. Sometimes incense is lit to lure the baby out, and to attract protective "zar" spirits. It is believed that both embryo and placenta consist of menstrual blood that has not come out and become coagulated like buttermilk; fermented with the male semen, like yeast. The placenta, "adäf" (discharged dirty part), also called "yäenqoḍä lej" (lit. host of the child), is buried out of sight. The baby is immediately fed butter, anointed with butter, and wrapped loosely in a warm toga. Meanwhile the mother is tightly bound in the long cotton [789] girdle, "lest her back hurt". In some areas, iron tools or weapons are placed close to her, to frighten off demons which fear iron.

● [842] If the baby is a boy, women emerge from the huts shouting "ollel". The father, usually waiting nearby, is summoned. There is merriment and drinking and "fukkara" dancing among men in the evening.

304 852 Circumcision ("gezrat") of boys takes place a week after birth, and is of less religious significance than the baptism which follows some weeks later. It is a simple operation of removal of the foreskin, usually carried out by a "wozäsha" (native herbologist-surgeon) or other skilled man. Uncircumcised persons, e.g. Shanqalla from the lowlands, are insulted as "aroten" (sheathed); even the Italians were referred to as "wäshälq", a reference to having foreskins; less insulting is the factual ter "gursam" (uncircumcised).

587 knowing both, has preferred her!

[588] A deserted wife, angry that her husband has found another, will often take a lover to buy her "a sheep for Epiphany", butter for her hair, and cotton for her distaff.

578 587 The following relationships are called "gobban", rivals, to each other:

"Semanya" versus "damoz" wife;

Man A, whose divorced wife lives with man B. The men are "gobban".

Woman X, whose divorced husband lives with, or married, woman Y.

"Semanya" and "damoz" wives, versus new concubine, "gärad", fearing permanency.

One "gärad" against another, (also called "wushemma").

But only "semanya" wives are regarded as legal rivals.

842 586 When a woman is barren, she may follow the biblical example and ask her husband to take a servant girl, "gärad" to have children with her. A "semanya" wife may be divorced on grounds of barrenness, but "with honor", taking half of their communal property with her. Amhara peasants believe that women become barren in the towns because of "loose living". A woman divorced on grounds of barrenness [588] will often have sexual intercourse with many men, hoping that she will conceive and thus have the blame of barrenness taken from her.

848 A bastard, "diqala" has full inheritance rights if his father acknowledges him. Bastards are believed to be of violent tempers, like "Muhammad Gran" (the Galla Muslim chief who devastated much of Ethiopia in the 16th century, reputedly a bastard).

586 When suing for divorce, either partner appeals to the "mänfäs qulle" (colloquially "qäññ away"), the "soul-counselor" priest, who has jurisdiction even over "semanya" marriages. Only he can

548 588 by them in the towns. Divorcees who are young and still attractive often do not want to return to their kinfolk, especially if they have seen town life and the kin life in remote rural hamlets. Like men doing manual labor, she may go to another district or even province to avoid shaming them. On this street she will usually begin by brewing daily barley beer, or even expand this to a small restaurant-inn performing the housekeeping tasks which she has been taught since early childhood and which are the only trade she knows. Occasionally she will then take in a travelling trader for 3 days or more, cook and bake and brew beer for him, also sleep with him if he desires. She hopes, not rarely with success, that one or the other will make the relationship permanent.

831 Men take great pride in virility, but also in sexual technique. They liken the activity to expertly "riding a horse" ("afärräsä" lit. he rode her like a horse, is used for "defloration"). Men believe that [842] it is frequency of intercourse, each night or several times each night, that brings conception. The popular, vulgar name for coitus is "bädda" (related to "bädäbbädä", he beat, whipped; shook with fever). Variations in sexual technique are referred to as "mett" (lit. hits). An impotent male is mocked as "alecha" (lit. sauce without pepper).

There is a sharp distinction between references that are "rude", consisting of direct references to sexual organs and activities; and veiled language used to refer to such matters, if at all, before an elder, priest, or upper-class person. The former is referred to as "yäsäfär qal" (lit. light matters), connoting "shameful matters". This includes such direct names as "qola" for penis ("jälla" is even more vulgar), "yäqola ferey" (lit. fruit of the penis) for testicles, "ens" for vulva. Curiously enough, overt loud expression of these terms are heard only from little boys, e.g. when, during the rainy season, they

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

These changes in the definition of marriage have produced tremendous tensions and heartache in the relations between generations. Deprived of authority in the occupational sphere, parents of modern adolescents cling with all the more pride to their traditional rights and obligations in the sphere of getting their children properly married. They often nag their children to leave school and get married while young. They stand determined to select their children's mates. If they do admit some consideration for their children's desires on the matter, they insist that any prospective spouse measure up to traditional criteria. As a result, disagreements between students and their parents revolve around the subject of marriage more frequently than anything else.

TABLE 7

DISPOSITION OF STUDENTS TOWARD TRIBAL AND RELIGIOUS EXOGAMY

		Secondary School		College Males (per cent)
		Males (per cent)	Females (per cent)	
Willingness to marry a person of a different religion.	Yes	29	33	60
	No	71	67	40
Willingness to marry a person of a different tribe....	Yes	64	73	84
	No	36	27	16
Number.....	.....	(392)	(40)	(194)

Modern adolescents, however, have by no means wholly rejected traditional attitudes and sentiments concerning marriage and courtship. Although a number of students say they want to marry for the modern reason of finding personal happiness through a satisfying love relation, many more indicate that they are chiefly inspired by the traditional motives of wanting to beget children. Most of them wish to continue the custom of having large families, the most frequently mentioned numbers of children desired being "four" and "more than six."*

The modern boys still widely share the traditional expectation that their

* The mean number of children desired by the college students in my sample is 4.23. This figure exceeds those of all the national college groups reported by Gillespie and Allport except Egypt and South African Bantu.

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[841] quired amounts of blood are continually renewed in fertile women, menstrual effluence is necessary to shed
* [192] blood not needed between pregnancies. Hence, the cessation of menstrual bleeding at menopause (arowgey) indi-
• [842] cates the loss of fertility. Arowgey is only one form
* [192] of infertility, however, since a woman may be infertile through magical causes even though she continues to menstruate (makan).

[825] The stomach is described as an inert organ housing a colony of wosfat worms. These are usually identified with ascariasis and are believed to transform food and drink into waste. For the host's well-being, their numbers must be sufficient to consume all ingested food; should they become over-abundant, however, hunger and a quarrelsome disposition will drive them to viciously attack accessible body organs.

*[192] Beyond these few naturalistic descriptions of organ functioning, the Amhara invokes Divine Providence (yi-Igziyabiher ara) to explain physiological processes, such as the renewal of menstrual blood and the source of vital heat. God further provides that, in the absence of intrusive influences, the parts of the body will function together to maintain a state of harmonious well-being (tena), devoid of pain and characterized by the vigor and physical control commensurate with the individual's age.

000 Malign agencies, both corporeal and incorporeal,

*753 owning debteras (as well as occasional laymen) possess
754 recipes. The third variety of pathogenic kifat works
[842] sends sexual maladies. Sterility, considered a very
[833] serious ailment, is sent to women only. Impotency affects both sexes; it is experienced by women as uncontrollable crying when approached or touched by any man, and is often confused with aynitila.

754 The most commonly owned non-pathogenic kifat works belong to a category known as "amderab". These works enable the operator to send onto his victim's house and fields misfortunes of fire, water (as destructive hail and rain storms), earth (as rains of stones and clods), air (as destructive winds), and putrification (as noxious odors). Other non-pathogenic kifat works have a domestic aspect (e.g., prepared foods are continually spoiled, food stores are consumed at an unnatural rate, servants grow discontent with the master's household, and domestic animals wander away); a mercantile aspect (e.g., trading rivals find it difficult to sell their goods, rival talla sellers find their newly prepared beer turning to a pitch-like consistency); or bring misfortunes at the hands of other human agents (e.g., the victim's son is made a wastrel, kenezereña, the victim repeatedly and unintentionally incurs the enmity of people, the victim exposes himself to ambush by enemies).

At its simplest, a kifat work requires a recitation,